



Connecticut School Transportation Association

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Statement by
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Before the
Transportation Committee
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Raised Bill 561

An Act Concerning the Penalty for Failure to Remove Snow and Ice from Motor Vehicles

Raised Bill 5902

An Act Concerning the Removal of Snow and Ice from Motor Vehicles

Raised S.B. No. 1096

An Act Concerning Fingerprinting Methods by the Department of Motor Vehicles

Good Morning, Sen. DeFronzo, Representative Guerrero and Honorable Members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is William D. Moore. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut School Transportation Association – COSTA. COSTA is a trade association comprised of owners and operators of school buses, student transportation vehicles and other associate members. Our membership of more than 125 companies and Boards of Education includes nearly all of the providers of student transportation in Connecticut. Together, they operate more than 10,000 school buses and Student Transportation Vehicles that transport more than 490,000 children to and from school safely every day.

I am appearing before you today regarding Raised SB 561, *An Act Concerning the Penalty for Failure to Remove Snow and Ice from Motor Vehicles*, Raised HB 5902, *An Act Concerning the Removal of Snow and Ice from Motor Vehicles*, and Raised SB No. 1096, *An Act Concerning Fingerprinting Methods Used by the Department of Motor Vehicles*.

Regarding SB 561 and HB 5902, we are respectfully asking for school buses to be exempted from the bill. Simply put, there is no equipment that can be used to clear the school

buses of snow and ice. There is no real way to safely clear rooftops. You cannot put a ladder on snow or ice – that is an OSHA violation. There are no manual scrapers that would completely remove snow, and definitely not ice; drive-through scrapers rip the emergency hatches off the top of the bus. School buses generally do not reach speeds that cause the snow and ice to fly off the roofs.

For these reasons, we respectfully request to be exempted from the bill.

We respectfully urge you to approve Raised Bill 1096 related to fingerprinting, with a modification in the language. Lines two and three of the bill require the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to “take immediate steps to provide electronic fingerprinting services” of applicants for school bus drivers’ licenses and endorsements. While we understand the intent of the language, we are concerned that, given recent history, the DMV may not. We understand the language to mean that the DMV shall immediately resume the electronic fingerprinting of school bus driver applicants, as previously had been the practice. We recommend that the language be changed in Lines two and three to read, “shall immediately provide electronic fingerprinting services . . .”

When the DMV was taking electronic fingerprints, the return time for the fingerprints was between two and three weeks. Presently, using the hard card method, that time frame is a seven to ten week turn-around. When the hiring season, which typically begins in July, starts, the hold up using the hard cards has been up to eighteen weeks.

We have employers who want to hire drivers. We have applicants who want to go to work. Our problem is that we are having a hard time keeping good applicants while we wait seven, ten, eighteen weeks and longer to find out if there is something in their past that would preclude them from driving a school bus.

While the applicants wait, some of the paperwork i.e., the physicals more often than not expire, thereby necessitating the applicant to have a second physical. Can you imagine trying to be hired under such conditions? Therefore, we are asking that language be inserted into the bill to the effect that once a completed application has been submitted to the DMV, all time lines required in the application are met. The drivers should not be penalized for things out of their control.

The system is broken and is in need of reform. We have approached the DMV and our concerns are ignored. We need legislation to repair a broken system.

Hiring and retaining drivers is an increasingly difficult thing for carriers due to the process employed by the DMV.

Drivers have to pass a proficiency test within one year of their license renewal. They cannot get scheduled for their proficiency tests until generally within one week of renewal. Should the driver fail, they cannot get re-scheduled for a proficiency until after their “S” endorsement has expired. As a result, they cannot drive a school bus – they are unemployed until they can take and pass a rescheduled proficiency test. The drivers should be able to take the

proficiency anytime during the year prior to license renewal as the law allows. In the rare instance where drivers are scheduled for a proficiency in advance of their renewal, the paperwork is only good for ninety days. We had a driver who for some reason was able to take a proficiency in September. His license renewed in February. The DMV refused to accept the proficiency because the paperwork was only good for ninety days. This makes no sense whatsoever.

There are only two DMV representatives giving proficiency exams during the week. Each year, approximately one-fourth of the drivers renew their licenses. That is more than 2,500 drivers – not including new tests to be administered. Clearly there are not enough DMV inspectors/agents to conduct the tests. As a result, the carriers are paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to the DMV in overtime on weekends so that other inspectors can be brought from other areas of the DMV to administer the tests. Inspectors who are not fully aware of the school bus requirements. As a result, more drivers are failing the proficiency tests. Many carriers have a “three strikes” rule. If the driver fails three proficiency tests, they are let go. We are hearing from carriers who are faced with a dilemma. They know that the drivers are able and prepared for the proficiency test. Inspectors who do not regularly administer the test are failing drivers. Should the carrier terminate the drivers because of this? Most of the failures are due to constantly changing interpretations of the test by these inspectors. The failures are due to the use of improper terminology, for instance, referring to “turning on my left blinker light” instead of “turning on my left directional signal.” This is unacceptable. We recommend that the state’s Master Instructors be allowed to administer the proficiency tests.

If there is a way to legislate how the DMV handles the paperwork once it is submitted, we urge you to do so. We suggest that the DMV be given a strict timeframe of no longer than four weeks to process applications. Applications can sit in the DMV for weeks while prospective drivers wait and wait. Carriers lose many applicants as a result. It is unfair to those who want to be hired and to those who want to hire drivers.

School buses are required to be inspected annually prior to registration. While school buses are inspected throughout the year, the majority of the school buses are inspected during the summer. Last year, more than 150 school buses sat in the dealer’s lot for nearly five months waiting to be inspected before they could be delivered to the new owner. When the DMV was again pressed in late August to inspect the vehicles, the response was that it was only August 22 and that the DMV would have the buses inspected by the required August 31. When the DMV was reminded that these new buses had to be delivered to Hartford for the start of school on August 25, and that the old fleet could not be used because it had not been inspected, the DMV miraculously was able to get them all inspected. The system does not work. On-line registration of new school buses by dealers should be allowed similar to the way new cars are registered.

There are many more reforms that need to be addressed in order to improve the system, and I hope that you will consider these recommendations as appropriate for this or the DMV bill that you will be considering.

We are not trying to go around any of the requirements. We firmly believe that safety is the most important part of what we do. We are simply looking for relief and an improved delivery of DMV services.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to address these bills. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.